DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 439 090 SP 039 038

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TITLE "Super-Vision": A Model Training Program for Teacher-Paraeducator Teams.
PUB DATE 1999-12-00
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Staff Development Council (Dallas, TX, December 1999).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; Elementary Secondary Education; Inservice Teacher Education; Observation; *Paraprofessional School Personnel; *Staff Development; *Supervision; Teacher Collaboration; Teacher Role; Teachers; *Teamwork

ABSTRACT

This article includes the contents of a paper presented at the 1999 National Staff Development Conference, then summarizes data collected from attendees of that conference session in response to a written survey distributed and completed during the session. The conference session explained that paraeducators require training, but there is concern over the additional responsibility which supervision of paraeducators represents for teachers (though paraeducator supervision and training might be considered an extension of the teacher's role). A 3-year project, Super-Vision: A Model for the Teacher's Role as Supervisor of Paraprofessionals, field-tested a curriculum which provided training in collaborative and professional development skills to teacher-paraeducator teams; developed a trainer's manual; provided training for teams; and provided orientation training to education administrators. The project developed a unique method for observing paraeducators and teachers. After being observed, participants completed self-evaluations. Conferences were held pre- and post-observation. This paper discusses some of the benefits from using an observation and conferencing procedure. Data from 21 attendees at the conference session indicated that most attendees would like more supports or tools and more comprehensive paraeducator training. Though many of their districts had paraeducator training, it tended to be insufficient. (SM)

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'SUPER-VISION:' A MODEL TRAINING PROGRAM FOR TEACHER-PARAEDUCATOR TEAMS

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Paper presented at the 1999 conference of the National Staff Development Council

"Faces of the Millennium: Our challenge, our future."

Dallas, TX. December 1999

SP039038

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'SUPER-VISION:'

A MODEL TRAINING PROGRAM

FOR TEACHER-PARAEDUCATOR TEAMS

This article is composed of two parts. The first represents the contents of a paper presented at the National Staff Development Council conference in Dallas, TX in December 1999. The second summarizes data collected from attendees of that conference session, in response to a written survey distributed and completed during the session. This data has been included here as it sheds further light on the topic of the paper, by providing additional information about those who are most directly involved in providing training to paraeducators and their supervising teachers.

PART I: SUPERVISION: A MODEL TRAINING PROGRAM FOR TEACHER-PARAEDUCATOR TEAMS

INTRODUCTION

The number and variety of demands upon teachers' time and resources have long been recognized, and they continue to increase with changes in school populations, legal requirements, and curriculum mandates. A feature of today's classrooms that reflects all of these influences is the increase in numbers of paraeducators[1] who are employed in schools (Moskowitz & Warwick, 1996) and whose assignments have become more technical and directly related to the instructional process over the last decade, rather than being of a clerical nature (Blalock, 1991). This change has led to concern about the training that paraeducators need for their new roles (Pickett, 1996), and also to concern over the additional responsibility which supervision of paraeducators represents for teachers.

In one sense, this is the teacher's natural domain. Teachers are accustomed to supervising students: assessing their skills, using tests and observation to evaluate the appropriateness of education programs, and making adjustments for individual student needs. Thus paraeducator supervision and training might be considered an extension of the teacher's role: the teacher can apply the skills used with students to assess paraeducator skills and competence through observation and supervised assignments, and then provide the information and training needed to

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[1] This is the most recent term recommended in the United States (Pickett, 1997) for paraprofessionals working in education (teacher aides, instructional assistants, education technicians, etc.), paralleling titles such as *paramedic* and *paralegal*.

enhance those skills. However, teachers are typically not prepared for this role through either pre-service or in-service training. (Salzberg & Morgan, 1996). They are obliged to assume the increased responsibilities without the benefit of training in supervisory skills.

THE FEDERALLY FUNDED TRAINING PROJECT

In response to the need for training for both paraeducators and their supervising teachers, the authors applied for and were granted federal funds through the Department of Education (Office of Special Education Programs) to direct a 3-year project. The project, entitled 'Super-Vision: A model for the teacher's role as supervisor of paraprofessionals," had four major objectives:

1. final field-testing of *Teamwork and Self-Evaluation for Teachers and Paraeducators*, a previously developed curriculum which provided training in collaborative and professional development skills to teacher-paraeducator teams;
2. development of a trainer's manual to accompany *Teamwork and Self-Evaluation*;
3. provision of training for teams of teachers and paraeducators using the above curriculum, and for school district personnel in delivery of the training;
4. orientation training for education administrators in the issues surrounding the employment, training and supervision of paraeducators, together with the development of an administrator's handbook relating to these issues.

After a brief overview of the contents of the training curriculum, with explanations of the reasons for including some of the topics, the remainder of this paper will outline an observation and data collection procedure which both provides training for the paraeducator, and gives the

teacher ongoing opportunities to demonstrate and renew her skills and expertise, as she acts as a role model for the paraeducator.

Contents of the training curriculum

The participant manual, *Teamwork and Self-Evaluation for Teachers and Paraeducators*, is divided into ten chapters. After a brief introduction, the chapters are as follows:

1. Classroom roles. This chapter discusses the importance of carefully defining the roles which are assigned to the paraeducator, as well as clarifying what the paraeducator might expect of the teacher. Emphasis is placed on clearly delineating the limits and extent of each role, and ensuring that responsibilities assigned are within the guidelines set by the school or school district.
2. Communication. This chapter provides opportunities for each participant to examine their own personal communication style and that of the other team member(s), in order to assess the impact of their combined styles and approaches on their work as a classroom instructional team. Participants are encouraged to consider ways in which they can adjust to other people's styles of working and communicating, and to examine whether their choices are based upon principle or preference, in order to assess the areas in which they feel they can be flexible and those in which they can reasonably take a stand.
3. Collaboration for teamwork. This chapter examines the benefits of working together with other adults in the classroom, the essential components of successful collaboration, and ways in which team members can - and do - assist each other in their work.
4. Effective instruction. This chapter was added to the previous version of the manual, as it

became clear during the course of training that many participants (particularly paraeducators) had limited knowledge of the basics of effective instruction. For those who did have the knowledge, the chapter provided a useful overview. It also established a common vocabulary within the group for discussing classroom practice and provided considerable validation of effective practices that teachers and paraeducators were already engaging in, but not always confident of.

5. Behavior management. This chapter was also added - for the same reasons as the previous chapter. It reviews some basic behavior management techniques: establishing positive relationships, the ABCs of behavior management, selecting and teaching class rules and procedures.

6. Evaluation. This chapter looks at the different forms which evaluation may take in the classroom, whether it be evaluation of student or adult performance. It also makes the important distinction between formative and summative evaluation, the forms they may take and their purposes. The chapter also emphasizes the importance of basing evaluation on sound data and of making evaluative comments which are non-judgmental and objective.

7. Observation. The contents of this chapter and the next are described in more detail in the next section of this paper. The observation procedure outlined here provides teachers and paraeducators with opportunities for professional growth, and gives teachers a framework for providing on-the-job training for their paraeducators.

8. Post-observation conferences. As we discuss more fully later, this chapter provides teachers and paraeducators with a framework for conducting the sort of professional

dialog which leads to improvement of practice and thereby increased levels of student success.

9. Case studies. The four case studies which make up this chapter provide participants with an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills which they have acquired through the training to real life situations. The format for the case studies is that an initial piece of information is presented and participants are asked to make a decision based on the facts. Additional information is then presented, shedding more light on the situation and perhaps prompting a change in the decision originally made. This is followed by a third piece of information which participants are asked to react to and refine their original decision. Each of the case studies is based on a situation know by or related to the authors.

10. Putting it all together. This chapter provides an overview of the concepts covered in the training and shows how they mesh together to provide a coherent model for professional development for classroom instructional teams.

The materials are contained in a 3-ring binder and have a workbook format, with frequent opportunities for participants to consider their own classroom practice and analyze a variety of suggested methods and approaches to their work. In addition to the basic informational text, interspersed with exercises and opportunities for reflection, each chapter has a written assignment and a list of classroom applications to assist teachers and paraeducators in applying the material to their own work situation. The content of the training is extensive enough to allow it to be used as the basis of a 2 semester hour university level course (at undergraduate or graduate level), although the training manual also suggests other formats, including workshops and week-long

training courses. The trainers manual includes lesson plans and a large number of additional resources, plus overhead projector transparency masters and a resource video, to assist in delivering the training to a variety of audiences and in number of different formats. The training materials have been extensively field-tested over a number of years, and have been extensively revised in response to feedback from teachers, paraeducators and instructors who have participated in the training and reviewed the materials.

THE OBSERVATION PROCEDURE

Basic assumptions

We have made three basic assumptions in recommending observation as a means of training paraeducators and engaging teachers in an ongoing renewal process.

- First, continuing professional development ensures that reflective practice and the development of a repertoire of professional skills do not stop when teachers complete their initial training.
- Second, the fact of having to collaborate with (or train) another person ensures that the teacher reflects on her own work, is better organized and more clearly knows her instructional goals and objectives, and makes the best possible use of available human resources for the benefit of students, and
- Third, on-the-job training is most likely to facilitate skill development in the areas most closely related to the paraeducator's classroom roles.

Observation of one professional by another, or of a paraeducator by a teacher is certainly

not a new concept. But the observation procedure which we propose has some important differences from those which are more typically described. Logistically the process is simple-- pre-conference - observation - self-evaluation - post-conference -- and these are described below. However the important differences are these:

1. The teacher is the first to be observed. This allows the teacher an opportunity to provide a role model of the effective practices and skills which she wishes the paraeducator to develop. The paraeducator is provided with an example of effective instruction before her own practice is observed.
2. In keeping with effective instructional procedures, the observation focuses on a very specific aspect of the instructional process or of classroom management. Learning takes place in small increments for both adults and children.
3. The combination of three components makes the training particularly effective: first, the teacher has the paraeducator watch as she models effective techniques; second, she asks the paraeducator to record what she sees on a very specific area of effective practice; and third, they meet together afterwards to discuss the data.
4. Even when the teacher observes the paraeducator, no evaluative comment is made on the observation form. Evaluation is considered a personal process of self-evaluation, aided by the facts that have been recorded during the observation and the ensuing discussion.

The logistics

Pre-conference. The teacher and paraeducator meet briefly to discuss a focus for the upcoming observation (which the paraeducator will conduct for the teacher) related to an aspect

of both the paraeducators and the teacher's classroom roles.

For example, if the paraeducator is using Direct Instruction to teach spelling to small groups of students, a component of Direct Instruction, such as rate of praise or techniques for correction, would be chosen for the observation. Or if the teacher wants to emphasize the importance of giving students many opportunities to respond to questions, the observation could focus on the number of questions asked.

This pre-observation conference is brief: just long enough to settle on a focus, decide when the observation will take place, and determine what data are to be collected, i.e. what type of information the observer should record on the observation form. (See Figure 1) The observer should record what will give the most information, within the limits of what it is possible to write. For example, if every question the teacher asks is written down, this gives information on both the number and the type of questions.

Observation. The observation takes place when it can be done unobtrusively and when the area of focus occurs with some frequency. We recommend observing from 10 to 20 minutes; if the teaching period is carefully chosen, this is ample time to collect helpful information. The observer should record what has been requested on the left-hand side of the form. The right-hand column, (*Notes*) is for recording thoughts and ideas related to the focus of the observation, e.g., "This really seemed to catch the kids' attention" or "I wonder if K. can really hear?"

Self-evaluation. Once the observation is completed, the form is given to the teacher, so that she can carefully consider the information recorded and draw conclusions about her own practice. There is a space on the form for writing conclusions drawn from the data.

For example, if the focus was the number of questions asked, and the form is filled with questions

asked during the observation session, then obviously she is asking a sufficient number of questions, and the focus for the next observation can shift to a more specific aspect of questioning: e.g. what types of questions are asked, or which students are asked to respond.

Post-observation conference. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the information on the form and the conclusions that the teacher has drawn, to seek solutions to issues that arise, and to exchange ideas. The paraeducator is not asked to pass judgment on the teacher's performance, which would not be appropriate, but can be asked for clarification of what is on the form, as well as insights into what was happening during the observation. If the paraeducator is the one who was observed, the teacher usually needs to lead this discussion, as she most often has experience and expertise, but the approach should be characterized by questions such as, "So what do think?" or "How did you feel that went?" rather than "Well, here's how I saw it." During the post-observation conference the observer is primarily a sounding-board, someone who encourages the thinking aloud which helps to crystallize ideas.

Once this procedure has been completed with the teacher being observed by the paraeducator, it is repeated and the teacher becomes the observer and data collector for the paraeducator. The focus of the observation should be the same, and enough time should be allowed for the paraeducator to practice the targeted skill before being observed. The same procedural guidelines apply, and the focus of the observation can be retained for as many times as it seems useful and informative, or changed if the observation data show that the skill has been acquired or that a different aspect of the skill could more appropriately be examined.

As is recommended with all classroom observation, simplicity is vital to this conference-observation- self-evaluation-conference procedure. The aspect of classroom practice chosen for

the focus must be small and specific. Educators, like students, learn and change in very small increments. A focus such as "questions," for example, is far too broad. Within that category you could consider: How many questions? What type of questions? (higher-level thinking questions or factual questions) Who is being asked? (boys, girls, a limited number of students). And of course, the focus must be appropriate to the circumstances. An observation on "the type of questions asked" would obviously not be suitable during silent reading. Even if the teacher or paraeducator is listening to a student read and quietly asking questions about the book during this time, it would be difficult for another person to hear the questions without being too close to be unobtrusive.

If teachers and paraeducators form the habit of using observation to evaluate the quality of what they do, they will find ongoing opportunities to observe many aspects of practice in the course of each school year, and each area of focus can be specific enough to offer challenge but not represent an impossible degree of change from week to week. Additionally they will both be able to see changes and improvements in their own practice as they monitor it through regular observation.

Speaking from experience

We have facilitated this observation procedure with many groups of teachers and paraeducators over the last several years, often in connection with training on collaboration and classroom teamwork. The initial reaction to peer observation is generally several seconds of silence, after which one brave soul, an unofficial spokesman for the group, may hesitantly raise a hand and say something like, "Um . . . er . . . we don't want to do this." A collective sigh of relief

indicates that the spokesman accurately represented the group's feelings, but we tend to insist, knowing that the benefits of observation become more obvious as it is practiced. The majority of teachers and paraeducators have become willing (even eager) to discuss observations, and later post-conferencing sessions which were audio-taped have shown that they engaged in lengthy and useful discussions of instructional techniques and student behavior. Typically it is not possible to determine who is the teacher and who is the paraeducator, as they make equally useful contributions and suggestions.

The benefits

In summary these are some of the positive results which teachers and paraeducators can expect to see from using an observation and conferencing procedure such as we have described:

1. Paraeducators' sense of worth and professional self-esteem are increased. As one paraeducator expressed it, "I thought I didn't have anything to contribute, but now I realize that I'm part of the team too."
2. Teachers have opportunities to model good practice for paraeducators and 'show off' their skills as they provide on-the-job training for their paraeducator.
3. A greater sense of teamwork develops as teachers and paraeducators discuss pupil needs and pool their knowledge and expertise. In one teacher's words, "...using the strengths of individuals to create a synergistic effect for learning for the kids." Standards are raised for both teacher and paraeducator.
4. Observation and evaluation lose the rather negative connotation they can have as conclusions are based on hard facts, and evaluation is self-evaluation. No one is required

to judge the other person's performance. As one teacher commented, "It was such a relief to know that I wouldn't have to say whether she'd done well or badly during the observation -- I actually enjoyed watching what was happening and taking note of what she'd asked for."

5. Paraeducators acquire the knowledge required to be able to make accurate judgments about their own performance using observational data, and can readily identify areas in which they needed training and support. Teachers become more comfortable with trusting a paraeducator to choose a focus for observation and to take data for them.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

The recommended sequence for the observation and feedback procedure is as follows:

1. Teacher and paraprofessional meet briefly (pre-conference) to discuss an upcoming observation. Together they identify an area of effective practice for focus e.g. whether the whole class/group is being involved when questions are asked. A time is set for the observation; we recommend 10 - 20 minutes.

2. The observation is carried out using a simple form (see Figure 1) on which only factual data are recorded. *No evaluative or judgmental comment is written on the form.*

3. The teacher makes a *self*-evaluation based on the information on the form, making brief notes on the bottom of the form in preparation for discussing the observation with the paraeducator.

4. The teacher and paraeducator meet again (post-conference), as soon after the observation as possible, to discuss the information on the form, to clarify what is written, and to discuss the implications of the data for classroom practice.

5. A time is agreed upon when the teacher can observe the paraeducator using the same area of focus, and the cycle of continues.

SUMMARY

Teachers have a great many demands made on their time and energy, some (such as the training and supervision of paraeducators) without the prerequisite training being provided. This can be burdensome and result in stress and burnout even for the most dedicated. We recommend this simple process of pre-conferencing, observation, self-evaluation and post-conferencing to harness the strengths of self-evaluation and peer feedback, as a means of providing training for paraeducators and motivating teachers to continue to reflect upon and improve their classroom practice. Both teachers and paraeducators, as members of the classroom instructional team, can evaluate their own performance, using the specific, descriptive information provided through the observation procedure, leading to enhanced motivation for teachers to examine their own classroom practices, and increased skills for both teacher and paraeducator.

Further details of the *Teamwork and Self-Evaluation for Teachers and Paraeducators* training materials or of the federally funded project *Super-Vision: A model for the teacher's role as supervisor of paraprofessionals*, can be obtained from either of the authors.

OBSERVATION FORM

Name:_____ Date:_____ Observer: _____

Focus of observation: _____

Observations	Notes

What conclusions can I draw from this observation? _____

_____

_____

_____

What should the focus of my next observation be? _____

PART II: SUMMARY OF DATA COLLECTED FROM CONFERENCE SESSION PARTICIPANTS

Data were collected from 21 attendees of the conference session. The roles of these respondents included staff/professional development coordinators, school principals, education consultants and specialists, union personnel, and coordinators of a variety of programs (Title I, federally funded projects, early childhood). The following facts emerged from the survey:

- On average respondents had worked in their current roles for 5.5 years, with a range of 1 - 12 years.
- Responsibilities for paraeducators included hiring, training, supervision and support.
- The number of paraeducators for which attendees had responsibility ranged from no direct contact with paraeducators to indirect responsibility for up to 1400.
- 6 (29%) of the respondents stated that had received no training at all which related to their responsibilities for paraeducators; of the remainder who stated that they had received some training, 6 (29%) had essentially gleaned useful information from other sources (e.g., working with teachers, life, graduate work in human resources) rather than the training being specific to their roles.
- 8 (38%) had the responsibility of hiring paraeducators for their school or district; this included 4 school principals, a personnel administrator, a Title I coordinator, Special Education coordinator, and an Education & Training coordinator.
- 10 (48%) had responsibility for reviewing or evaluating paraeducators' performance; this was largely the same group who had responsibility for hiring paraeducators with the

exception of the personnel coordinator and the addition of an Early Childhood coordinator, a Director of organizational support, a vocational instructor, and a union representative.

- 15 (71%) of the respondents stated that they had written policies regarding the employment and work of paraeducators in their school or district policy manual
- 15 (71%) of the respondents stated that they had training programs for paraeducators in their school or district, although 7 (33%) of them qualified this statement with such comments as 'not comprehensive,' 'not enough,' 'informal only.'

The final question on the survey asked whether there were areas in which attendees felt that they would benefit from more supports or tools in dealing with paraeducators. 17 (81%) of the respondents stated that they would benefit from more supports or tools. The majority of requests focused upon the need for paraeducator training. Topics listed included:

- pre-service training; different models of training; the need for paraeducators to have knowledge of child development, teaching reading and math, effective communication and teaming, etc.;
- other topics listed included: bench-marking on best practices; systemic alignment and effective scheduling; how to implement what we already know.

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